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Letter from John W. H. Baker to Julia Ann Baker, 1855 Jan. 12

John W. H. Baker

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Mokelumne Hill, Jan'y 12th, 1855

My Dear Wife

Once more has come the day for writing my semi-monthly communication and a very beautifull day it is, warm as summer with a clear and invigorating atmosphere like that of a New England Spring. Our New Year was ushered in with quite a severe storm of rain and hail which continued with a few hours of intermission for 3 or 4 days. We were all rejoiced to see such weather but are now feeling quite disappointed to have had so little of the thing which was so much needed. So far the rains have benefitted the agricultural portion of California, as it has moistened the earth so that they are able to plough, and it will no doubt start vegetation into new life. But for mining purposes we are now almost as destitute of water as we were before the rain, in fact we must have a week or ten days of heavy rain before the mining region will be supplied with water. The times, as we must naturally expect, are dull and as I have before said will remain thus untill our golden treasures can again be gathered from their natural resting place. As all business suffers in such hard times as these, ours does not escape. We are doing a very light business and unless something new turns up we shall most likely be doing less than at present. My prospects look rather discouraging compared with what they were one year since. Still I have the belief that we shall have rains soon and with them will come a little easier times in regard to money. We have a large amount due us which would be paid were our debtors able to work their claims but so long as that remains out of the things that are possible, so long must we expect to wait payment. You have always manifested a desire to know about my business and my prospects and for that reason I have written the above, but in summing it all up, I may say that I am doing a business which pays me moderate wages over and above my expenses. But with such I should not feel satisfied to remain here if I had have accomplished the end for

which I came to this country. My object was to obtain enough to give us a home and clear ourselves from all debts. And I think that end can be accomplished in the course of the present year if business is no worse than at the present time. Some months since I was offered \$1000 for my chance of business here with my stock of goods, and I almost wish that I had taken it. Still I think in a few months more I shall have done better than to have taken that amount, for with \$1000 I would have been obliged to pay \$200 for my indebtedness and \$300 for a passage home leaving me with only about \$500. With such a sum as that I could hardly think of returning.

I received your letter a few days since which talks a little homesick as well as my letters do but nevertheless I hope we shall both recover without any serious damage. we cannot expect to be situated as we are without feeling a little homesick at times, for were it otherwise I would expect that the socialities of married life were not agreeable. But so far as my wishes are concerned I desire and pray for the time to come when I may again be united to my family. I am nearly satisfied with this lonely life and wish to see my children around me, giving me some of those frolicsome pleasures and pastimes which I used so much to enjoy in former times. I would have enjoyed your Thanksgiving very much and should have been pleased to see with what eagerness Fred would satisfy himself under the promise of "eating all he wanted". I think he must have filled himself up roundly. But then what a pity it was that Sis should be so troubled to keep her supper down "for it would keep coming up into her mouth"-- Did Sis find out whether Harriett's supper did the same as hers? If so I would have recommended a little epecac and vomit it up; and then eat a different kind of supper which might prove better. I think Fred must have looked some like a hog's bladder blown up, about the time he finished his supper. But I don't know but this simile may be a little offensive to him, if so I beg to be excused, for I was writing what I might have said to him if I had been present.

Our thanksgiving came off one week previous to yours, the day passed as usual and in the evening a few of us had a supper of oysters and chickens and custard Pies-- We had a very good supper-- but when compared with yours it was very meagre. The last mail brought me a letter from J. P. Chellis which I was happy to receive. He writes very encouragingly and in relation to my family he says, "They are all well and I think get along first rate--" that I am glad to hear. From his letter I learn that Dr. Lane is pretty well liked as a citizen but they seem to think he lacks energy. I am sorry he is not more generally liked and employed, but so far as that matters I am not to blame. I told him the truth so far as my business was concerned and that he does not do as much I could not be answerable. It was a good place for business when I left and I had no doubt that it would pay almost any man enough for his support and a comfortable little sum to lay aside for the future, and that too annually--This much I can say now, that for the last three years I was there I was doing enough to support my family and gathering in advance from \$100 to \$200 annually. With that, considering my expenses and other things, I considered myself doing well.

I even now have so good an opinion of the place that I am more than half inclined to return and locate in that village--and would like to know if he would take the same amount for the place which he gave.

Mr. Chellis informs me that my friend, Gerry Beers, is not making a very great stir of business at the present. I am glad to hear that and think if I had remained there untill this time his show for business would have been still less. I am surprised that the people have tolerated his nonsense thus long. Mr. Barrows I understand has gone into trade in the place of Stevens, who is in a feeble state of health, as I understand. I am quite sorry to hear such news. I had hoped Stevens would continue in business there and, having good health, be one of our most enterprising and usefull citizens, but thus it is we can never foresee the changes to be wrought in future, even in the smallest matters.

Now as a matter of news I suppose I must give you the information of my partner's New Year's present. Mrs. Holbrook was confined on the evening of Jan'y 1st, the result of which was the birth of twin daughters, a couple of very nice looking babies they are. Oh! California is wonderfully productive! Mrs. H. is getting up very slowly. Dr. H. gives his whole attention to his wife & babies so that I have the whole charge of the store as usual. The labor is nothing but the confinement is tedious I can assure you. Daniel Bryant will have reached home ere this is received I suppose he did pretty well while in the country, but I think he was in luck to leave rather than to remain in the country another year for I apprehend that we shall see something of a panic ere long in the merchantile line of business. I would like to hear from Daniel, and shall expect him to write me as he promised me in his last letter previous to his starting for home. I have not recieved "the letter" from Mr. Wingate. I suppose he is so busy in the enjoyment of home and family that he hardly thinks of others. Who purchased Baxter Morrill's Place of residence? How does my old patinet Semantha Freeman get along? I suppose she will not be offended if I enquire for her. Hannah, Oliver, Jane, Martha & all the little ones I suppose are well and with such supposition I send them my kind regards. Please remember me to Mr. & Mrs. Chellis. How do the Penniman family get along since the death of their father?

With all these questions and other matters contained I draw this letter to a close by presenting to you the love and regards of

Your Affectionate Husband
John W. H. Baker

Mrs. Julia Ann Baker
Meriden, N. H.